

Introduction: The Senses in Social Interaction

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In this introduction, we provide the scholarly background that motivates the special issue and briefly discuss its content. We touch on contemporary debates in symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, and anthropology that inform the research undertaken by the contributors. We conclude by deriving six interrelated themes—intersection, entwinement, multimodal, contextually embedded, structured, and serendipitous—from an examination of the articles.

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INTRODUCTION: THE SENSES IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

The past two decades have seen a growing interest in the “senses” across the social science (Howes and Classen 2013; Low 2012; Paterson 2007; Pink 2015; Stoller 2010; Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk 2012; Waskul and Vannini 2008). Stoller’s (2010) “sensuous scholarship” offers an important envisioning of why the senses are important, and a performance of this scholarship in action—a kind of scholarship where bodies and their sensory possibilities are a focus and a resource, where a scholar may “lend one’s body to the world and accept its complexities, tastes, structures and smells” (xvii) in an openness to the “sensuous constitution of local epistemologies” (3). The central idea involves treating the senses as much under-explored resources for sociocultural meaning as well as an important site of studying inscribed, negotiated, and embodied knowledge and practice.

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This “sensory revolution” (Howes 2006) involves a shift from the long-standing privileging of sight and vision as sources of meaning (and sources of data) in the social sciences and an opening up to broader sensory categories and practices, as well as exploring the cultural construction of those very categories (Vannini et al. 2012). Over the past two decades the sociology of the senses has become an increasingly well-established area of study, evidenced in the formation of the “senses and society” thematic group at the International Sociological Association, and the journal *The Senses and Society*, which publishes a large amount of sociological work.

While it has not always been framed explicitly as sensory scholarship, interactionist perspectives have had a long-standing interest in the senses. For example, since the 1980s ethnomethodological studies have used video recordings as a principal source of data to investigate the organization of action and interaction (Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff 2010). This research investigates topics such as how chemists observing a reaction decide when a material has become black (Goodwin 1997), how auctioneers come to see people in the audience at auction as potential bidders for a lot (Heath 2013), and how museum visitors jointly come to see a painting in a particular way (vom Lehn 2018). This research analyzes people’s talk and bodily action as a means of leveraging an interest in how people notice and make relevant the people, objects, contexts, and features of interaction. Only quite recently has work in this field begun to explore other senses. For example, contributions to Cekaite and Mondada’s (2020) edited volume explore how “touch” features in social interaction, while Alač (2020a, 2020b) critically discusses the concept of intersubjectivity by examining how a concerted experience can arise among researchers in a laboratory of olfactory psychophysics. The sense of hearing is at the center of Egbert and Deppermann’s (2012) book, in which the authors discuss, for example, how hearing problems are negotiated in doctor-patient interaction.

Work of this type contrasts with much existing research in the field which focusses on the “cultural significance” of sensorial action (Howes and Classen 2013) or the phenomenological experience and the meanings of sensorial action *in absence of a close analysis of the interaction order in which such meanings are situated* (Gibson and Lehn 2020). This special issue aims to contribute to the growth of interactionist work by showing the critical contribution that scholars in this area are making to the study of the senses. The articles included in the issue are principally concerned with how the senses are invoked in communicative practice in everyday life and how people make their sensorial experiences accountable to one another. The papers mark a turning point in the study of the senses by analyzing empirically senses as *interactional phenomena*—that is, how people *communicate about* the senses; how talk, gesture, gaze, material artefacts, physical environments, and other resources are used to make the senses accountable to other participants; and how senses are made relevant and observable to unfolding interaction.

OVERVIEW OF THE PAPERS

Through the consideration of diverse contexts and activities, the papers in this special issue demonstrate the orderly character of how senses are dealt with by people within interaction. Danielle Pillet-Shore's article "When to Make the Sensory Social: Registering in Face-to-Face Openings" examines how people notice features of the interactional environment, particularly how they look, smell, sound, or feel. Focusing on the openings of face-to-face encounters, she analyses the ways that features of the context are brought to the sensorial attention of others, showing that these opening sequences display clear organizational features with preferences for the sequential placement of particular types of noticing actions. Pillet-Shore's careful analysis shows the ways in which such sequences are organized has real implications for the presentation and negotiation of participants "face" and their relationships and affiliations.

The theme of collaborative engagement in sense work is pursued by Giolo Fele and Kenneth Liberman who, in "Some Discovered Practices of Lay Coffee Drinkers" explore how people negotiate, arrive at, and use interactionally agreed accounts of the taste of coffee. The authors point to three methods used by coffee tasters in their conversations: *clustering* — where users drew on multiple descriptors to reach an account of taste; *objectivating* — the ways that particular accounts or descriptors become reified and used as resources by a group within a given setting; and *calibrating* — reaching a shared understanding (an intersubjectivity of standpoints) by adapting to and adopting other users' descriptors and account terminology. Fele and Liberman emphasize the serendipitous nature of these processes, and the ways that descriptors and the methods of doing description take on a life of their own within a given interaction context.

Lorenza Mondada's article "Orchestrating Multi-Sensoriality in Tasting Sessions: Sensing Bodies, Normativity, and Language" draws attention to the interaction between talk and other communicative resources including bodies, objects, semiotic tools and cultural norms in the multisensorial process cheese tasting in a guided, professional cheese course. This analysis explores many of the complex ways that these diverse resources intersect in tasting, such as how accounts of tasting feedback on the bodily engagement with objects, or how people simultaneously touch the cheese while, say, reading descriptions about the cheese and or talking to others about them. Through this analysis, we come to see that the action of sensing has a complex relationship to the ways an object is used in a given context, the common-sense/conventionalized/institutionalized understandings and discourses that inform the action.

Sally Wiggins and Leelo Keevallik continue the discussion of "tasting" in their article "Enacting Gustatory Pleasure on Behalf of Another: The Multimodal Coordination of Infant Tasting Practices." The authors reveal how "gustatory *mmms*" are used by parents feeding their young children to re-focus the interaction on "taste." They show that tasting as a social practice can be enacted on behalf of others through

precisely positioned non-lexical vocalizations. The analysis is based on a detailed examination of video-recordings of parents feeding their infants and focuses on the production and design of parental “mms” in relation to eye gaze, sequentiality, and the temporal coordination of hands, food, and mouths. The article makes important contributions to studies of the sociality of tasting as well as to infant feeding research that all too often neglect the examination of real-time vocal and embodied conducts.

The communication around sensorial experience is a critical part of much professional activity, and three of the chapters here deal with contexts where sensory communication is central to the work at hand. In “Voicing the bike: reducing knowledge asymmetries in collaborative work of a motorcycle racing team,” Francesca Salvadori and Giampietro Gobo examine how Grand Prix Motorcycle drivers and their managers talk about the drivers’ riding experience during pre-season testing. The analysis shows that these conversations sit within a complex and pressurized context where decisions need to be made quite quickly in order to trial different bike configurations. The analysis focusses on how drivers articulate their experience and how managers use these articulations to make decisions about possible technical alterations to the bike. These accounts are collaboratively produced and involve the careful use of gestures and verbal articulations and re-articulation of complex and fast-paced kinaesthetic experiences in order to reach an alignment of description, accounts, and ultimately, a mutual understanding.

Research on sensory perception often focuses on one sense, such as touch, smell, or sight and considers sensory perception as subjective and private. The articles in this special issue powerfully show that perception involves action. This point is further enhanced by Brian Due’s article entitled “Distributed Perception: Co-operation between Sense-able, Actionable and Accountable Semiotic Agents.” Due examines video-recorded situations of interaction involving visually impaired people showing that perception is achieved not only through sensory action but it also results from participants’ interaction with other agents, such as digital systems and dogs. His study reveals aspects of the organization of actions produced by sense-able, action-able, accountable semiotic actions that by sharing information about their perception of the world around them make situations manageable for participants.

The importance of sensory perception for the management of situations also is critical for the arguments made in Sylvie Grosjean, Frederik Matte and Isaac Nahon-Serfaty’s paper “‘Sensory Ordering’ in Nurses’ Clinical Decision-Making: Making Visible Senses, Sensing, and ‘Sensory Work’ in the Hospital,” in which the authors look at the role of the senses in nurses’ clinical decision making. The study draws on focus groups where nurses describe how sensory work informed their engagement with patients and their decision making. The analysis shows that senses are integral *resources* for nurses and are engrained, embodied features of how clinical assessments are made. The smells, bodily comportments, facial expressions of patients along with the sound, feel, and look of bodies are shown to be all part of the everyday “sensory work” of doing nursing.

David Edmonds and Christian Greiffenhagen's article "Configuring Prospective Sensations: Experimenters Preparing Participants for What They Might Feel" addresses the issue of communicating about the senses in the context of a neuroscience experiment. Their analysis looks at how experimenters explain to participants how and what they are likely to feel in a part of the process where a needle is used, highlighting various resources such as describing what participants *won't* feel as well as demonstrations of the foreshadowed sensations on their own and the participants bodies. Edmonds and Greiffenhagen show that these techniques and resources were a key part of how participants are reassured, and, therefore, were an integral part of the work at hand for the experimenters.

The final paper in this collection shows the potential of interactionist work to contribute to interdisciplinary study of the senses. Eduardo De la Fuente and Michael Walsh's article "Framing Atmospheres: Goffman, Space, and Music in Everyday Life" turns attention to how people use and experience music in the creation of *atmospheres* that is the "moods of events and gatherings" — in particular social spaces and contexts. The authors draw on work from diverse fields of atmosphere studies, aesthetics, and urban studies, as well as Goffman's work, to show the important contribution of interactionism to this area of research. De la Fuente and Walsh argue that Goffman showed a deep interest in social atmosphere as an embodied, corporeal, and emotive experience, and suggest that when combined with concepts that draw attention to the complex role of senses and affect in interaction, we can generate a deep understanding of people's lived experiences.

From these studies, we can draw out six interrelated concepts/themes that are found across these diverse papers and contexts: (1) *intersection* — the ways that different categories of sense overlap with one another; (2) *entwinement* — the interplay of sensory experience with diverse cultural and contextual resources, which, in turn, inform and play on people's sensory experiences; (3) *multimodal* — the wide range of resources other than spoken language (including gesture, gaze, pointing, facial expressions, and objects themselves) to make the senses accountable; (4) *contextually embedded* — people's production of accounts about the senses are a part of and have implications for other social practices and actions; (5) *structured* — there are observable structural preferences for how the senses are enacted and accounted for; (6) *serendipitous* — alongside such structural preferences there is an ad-hoc or improvised character to how people describe to others and make use of the senses in their actions. These six concepts help us to see the complexity of the local orderings involved in people's everyday sense work and, we suggest, form a useful framework for both reading the papers in this study and for future work in this area.

As a concluding reflection, a common observation in sensory scholarship is that conventional categories of sensing (such as hearing, touching, seeing, smelling, etc.) are cultural frames that limit our understanding of the lived orders of sensory work (Paterson 2007; Pink 2010; Vannini et al. 2012). A number of the articles in this special issue have shown that, precisely because they are common cultural frames, these conventional categories are routinely used by people as resources to make the

senses accountable (to each other and to researchers) and to interpret their own experiences. However, these common-sense categories are not the only resources available to people. The papers show how communities use specialist concepts and terminology and *methods* and *structures* of action in the effort to make the senses *palpable, describable, and workable*. One of the great strengths of the papers presented here is to show clearly and in detail the operations of these methods. We hope that the exciting papers included in this collection are the start of a rich stream of interactionist analysis of sense work, a field that has much to contribute to the evolving domain of sensory sociology.

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